



State of Louisiana

Louisiana Department of Health

Office of the Secretary

December 29, 2020

Dear Nursing Home Residents, Families, and Staff,

The availability of COVID-19 vaccines is a critical and powerful step in the ongoing efforts to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Vaccines offer the greatest potential to reduce COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths in our nursing homes and our communities.

With the vaccine now available to residents and staff of Louisiana's nursing homes, we strongly encourage all eligible individuals to be vaccinated at the earliest opportunity. Taking this important step will allow Louisiana to move forward to a brighter, healthier new year.

Nursing home residents and staff have been among the very first groups of people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. As you all know, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on nursing homes throughout Louisiana. Not only is there a high risk of COVID-19 transmission in congregate living settings, but nursing home residents are especially vulnerable to severe illness and death from COVID-19.

In our state alone, there have been more than 12,000 locally acquired COVID-19 infections reported in nursing home residents, with 2,829 nursing home resident deaths identified as of December 21. These nursing home deaths constitute 40 percent of all COVID-related deaths in Louisiana.

COVID-19 has also taken an enormous toll on nursing home staff members, who have endured much personal sacrifice to tirelessly care for and protect those living in nursing home communities. The health of nursing home staff has also been directly impacted by COVID-19, with more than 9,000 infections reported among nursing home staff members statewide.

The vaccines are extremely safe. There are currently two vaccines available under the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) because they have been tested and evaluated for safety and effectiveness. Both vaccines have gone through rigorous review and been evaluated through large clinical trials.

The Moderna vaccine has shown to be 94.1 percent effective, and the Pfizer vaccine has shown to be 95 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 illness. As with all vaccines, there is a low risk of side effects, most commonly injection site pain, fatigue, headache, and muscle pain. Severe adverse reactions were extremely uncommon, and the benefits of the protection against COVID-19 far outweigh the minimal risks associated with a vaccination. This is especially true for vulnerable and at-risk populations, and those who come into contact with them. Even individuals who were infected with COVID-19 in the past will benefit from receiving the vaccine as we know reinfections occur and the vaccine will further strengthen one's immune system.

The availability of safe and highly effective COVID-19 vaccines safeguards our most vulnerable residents and also brings much needed hope and encouragement to all Louisianans. When enough people are vaccinated, it provides protection even to those who are not yet immune.

This is how the spread of COVID-19 will finally be stemmed and how people and communities can begin the long-awaited return to normal. Vaccinating enough people to reach this goal will take time and teamwork. This is why nursing home residents and staff are at the front of the line to receive the vaccines.

Yours in health,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Kanter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph Kanter, MD, MPH
Assistant State Health Officer
Interim Assistant Secretary
Louisiana Department of Health

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Theresa Sokol". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Theresa Sokol, MPH
Interim State Epidemiologist
Office of Public Health
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